

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 00440 051129Z

67

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSO-00

/057 W

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R 051100Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4169

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: COMMUNAL INCIDENTS IN PUTTALAM

1. DUSK TO DAWN CURFEW HAS BEEN IMPOSED FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD IN PORTIONS OF PUTTALAM DISTRICT IN NORTHWEST SRI LANKA AFTER COMMUNAL INCIDENTS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF MUSLIM AND SINHALESE BUDDHIST COMMUNITIES. SINHALESE AND TAMIL PAPERS, NOT ENGLISH, REPORTED FIVE OR SIX DEATHS, CAUSED, NEWS REPORTS SAID, BY POLICE FIRING ON MUSLIM MOB OF APPROX 1,500 PEOPLE.

2. TROUBLES APPARENTLY AROSE OUT OF SPORADIC ATTACKS ON SINHALESE BUS EMPLOYEES RESULTING IN SHIFTING OF TOWN'S CENTRAL BUS STATION LAST MONTH AWAY FROM MUSLIM PLACES OF BUSINESS. THIS AROUSED ACTIVE OPPOSITION BY MUSLIM BUSINESSMEN. ATTACKS BY MUSLIMS AND SINHALESE ON EACH OTHER FOLLOWED, COMING TO HEAD SEVERAL DAYS AGO WHEN POLICE WERE BROUGHT IN AND FIRING RESULTED. FORCEFUL POLICE ACTION AND CURFEW HAVE APPARENTLY QUIETED SITUATION.

3. THERE HAS BEEN NO ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL OR DOWNPLAY INCIDENTS EXCEPT IN GOVT-CONTROLLED LAKE HOUSE PRESS. PRIME MINISTER MADE STATEMENT IN ASSEMBLY
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FEB 3 SETTING OUT FACTS AND WARNING THAT SHE

WOULD NOT TOLERATE COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND WOULD USE ALL RESOURCES AT HAND TO PREVENT IT. SHE ADDED THAT SHE WAS AWARE THAT THESE INCIDENTS MIGHT BE RESULT OF "POLITICALLY MOTIVATED MISCHIEF MAKERS SEEKING TO DAMAGE SRI LANKA'S IMAGE ON EVE OF (AUGUST) NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT CONFERENCE."

4. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT PUTTALAM TROUBLES HAVE TRIGGERED INCIDENTS IN OTHER AREAS. ISOLATED COMMUNAL INCIDENTS IN MUSLIM AREAS ARE NOT UNUSUAL. PUTTALAM ELECTORAL DISTRICT, REPRESENTED BY OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY MUSLIM M.P., IS 42 PERCENT MUSLIM, 35 PERCENT SINHALESE, WITH MOST OF REMAINDER TAMILS, ETHNICALLY CLOSER TO MUSLIMS THAN SINHALESE.
VAN HOLLEN

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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